



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

CALL to ACTION : FOR THE RECORD

An Increase in the Number of Vital Congregations

Key Drivers of Vital Congregations

From the Call To Action Report

- *Effective pastoral leadership including aspects of management, visioning and inspiration*
- *Multiple small groups and programs for children and youth*
- *Mix of traditional and contemporary worship services*
- *High percentage of spiritually engaged laity who assume leadership roles*

Vital congregations are the heart and soul of a vibrant and fruitful United Methodist Church. Congregations are the places where new disciples of Jesus Christ are being made; where people grow by grace and are nurtured; where the Church bears witness to the gospel and engages in partnerships for works of mercy and justice in communities and the world. Since the time of John Wesley, organizing communities of people involved in experiencing the means of grace and serving others has been a centerpiece for the Methodist movement. It is time to reclaim that focus in a new way and to encourage one another; to be accountable to one another; and to empower one another for greater effectiveness in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Creating Vital Congregations

There are many places across the worldwide United Methodist Church where this is already happening. More than 20,000 congregations in the United States and Central Conferences have set measurement goals in five common areas: 1) worship attendance; 2) numbers of professions of faith; 3) number of small groups; 4) number of disciples doing outreach in the community and the world; and 5) amount of money given to mission. The primary use of setting goals and tracking results is to provide opportunities for reflection and conversation that will strengthen ministry. Leaders ask: What have we learned over the last half year from working on our goals? What has gone well? What didn't go as expected? What will we do in the next 6 months to continue to work on our goals?

Creating vital congregations is not a program or fad. It is a way of being a faithful church of Jesus Christ. It is about worship, forming faithful disciples of Jesus, reaching out to bear witness to the gift of the gospel, working for justice, and serving others. Congregations across the UMC are already living this way. But there is a growing consensus that we want to and can create more vital congregations and provide resources and tools to pastors, lay leadership and annual conferences so they become even more fruitful.

The Importance of Metrics

Metrics can be useful tools to help gauge the health and vitality of congregations. Jesus lived and taught by the numbers. He withered a fig tree because it was not bearing measurable fruit. It had leaves, but not signs of vitality—fruit. Jesus taught about talents and that multiplying talents was a sign of faithfulness. The scriptures often included numbers—5,000 fed, 10 healed, 12 disciples made. Jesus said, “You will know them (disciples) by their fruit.” (Matthew 7:16). Metrics are a resource to measure vitality and to set appropriate goals that move the congregation toward health and move The United Methodist Church toward achieving its mission.

Indicators of Healthy Ministry

- *Worship Attendance*
- *Number of new professions of faith*
- *Number of small groups to grow the faith of disciples*
- *Number of members engaged through the church in community and world mission*
- *Amount of money given beyond the local church for community and world mission*

A full list of the 16 key drivers of vitality according to the Call To Action Report is available at www.umvitalcongregations.org.

Why is the Connectional Table Legislation important to creating Vital Congregations?

Currently, only 15% of United Methodist churches are considered highly vital. Legislation from the Connectional Table seeks to align resources and priorities across all sectors of the church with the expectation that we will see an increase in the number of vital congregations. The goal is to assure greater collaboration, alignment of local, annual conference and general church activity and more strategic use of financial resources.

Proposed Legislative Changes to Create Vital Congregations

To implement the Call to Action recommendations, the Connectional Table proposes:

- The creation of the United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry (CCMM) -- consolidating the functions of nine existing general agencies -- in order to better serve local churches and annual conferences in their work of increasing the number of vital congregations.
- Establishing a General Council for Strategy and Oversight (GCSO) providing for selection of the members of the CCMM Board, ongoing evaluation of results and liaison to annual conference leaders, the Advisory Committee on Ministry with Young People and other critically important constituency groups.
- Redirecting some general church spending to assure that the emphasis on creating more vital congregations is supported with investments in strategic work.

Why are these changes being proposed and what are the hoped for achievements?

Every church, regardless of its location or how many people attend on Sunday mornings, can be highly a vital congregation. The more our UMC resources are aligned and parts of the Connection work together, the greater our fruitfulness and witness to the world. The proposed legislation is important because it gives us greater flexibility, accountability and responsiveness to meet the needs of congregations and mission partners around the world.

There are already many resources available to help churches become more vital. Please visit www.umvitalcongregations.org for more information.